

# Ngā Pou Principles Guidance



**Te Kawa Mataaho**  
Public Service Commission

**Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa**  
New Zealand Government



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# 1

## Ngā Pou Principles

1.1 New Zealand’s public service principles are central to the way we deliver services and outcomes for New Zealanders. They help to preserve public trust and confidence in our ability to serve current and future governments. The five principles are:

- politically neutral
- free and frank advice
- merit-based appointments
- open government
- stewardship

## Kupu whakataki Introduction

- 1.2 Ngā Pou | Principles guidance provides information about the public service principles and the role of agencies, their leaders and public servants.
- 1.3 The Public Service Commissioner has issued this guidance under [section 19](#) of the Public Service Act 2020.
- 1.4 This guidance is part of He Aratohu – Integrity and Conduct guide and should be read in conjunction agencies’ own policies and procedures. Where appropriate, links to related content contained within He Aratohu – Integrity and Conduct guide have been included.
- 1.5 This guidance is not exhaustive and sits alongside any relevant legislative requirements. It is intended to complement those requirements but not replace them. In the event of inconsistency, the legislative requirements prevail.



## Who this guidance is for

- 1.6 The public service principles and agencies' responsibilities are set out in the Public Service Act 2020. Under [section 12](#), public service chief executives,<sup>1</sup> an interdepartmental executive board, a board of an interdepartmental venture, and boards of Crown agents have a statutory responsibility to ensure the agencies they lead uphold the principles when carrying out their functions<sup>2</sup>. Public servants support their leaders in performing this responsibility.
- 1.7 This guidance is being issued to the following agencies:
- Departments and departmental agencies
  - Interdepartmental executive boards and interdepartmental ventures
  - Crown agents
  - Crown entities (excluding tertiary education institutions, Crown Research Institutes and their subsidiaries and School Boards of Trustees)
  - Companies named in Schedule 4A of the Public Finance Act 1989,
  - Parliamentary Counsel Office, and
  - Any other entities where legislation confirms the agency is subject to section 19 of the Public Service Act 2020.
- 1.8 The agencies that this guidance applies to are referred to as the 'public sector' for the purposes of this guidance.

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<sup>1</sup>Public service chief executive means a chief executive of a department or departmental agency or a functional chief executive (Public Service Act 2020, [section 5](#))

<sup>2</sup>Public Service Act 2020, section 12 (2) and section 12 (6)

## Other agencies

- 1.9 This guidance does not apply to the following agencies:
- New Zealand Defence Force
  - New Zealand Police
  - Crown Research Institutes and their subsidiaries
  - Public Finance Act 1989 Schedule 4 organisations
  - Public Finance Act 1989 Schedule 5 Mixed ownership model companies
  - State-owned enterprises
  - School Boards of Trustees
  - Tertiary education institutions, such as universities

However, anyone can use this guidance to know more about the public service principles and integrity and conduct obligations.

- 1.10 An up-to-date list of all central government organisations can be found at: [Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission - Central Government organisation list](#).



# 2

## Te Noho Taiapa | **Political Neutrality**

*We act in a politically neutral manner.*

### **What is political neutrality?**

- 2.1 Political neutrality is about serving New Zealand's democratically elected government to the best of our professional abilities, irrespective of our own personal political opinions.
- 2.2 A politically neutral and professional public service was first introduced through the Public Service Act 1912. It has remained a fundamental principle of our system of government since then.

### **Why is political neutrality important?**

- 2.3 Political neutrality is the foundation upon which:
  - a. **We serve current and future governments.** We maintain the capability and institutional memory that allows us to serve governments over time. Political neutrality preserves our ability to serve current and future governments, irrespective of its political composition.
  - b. **We maintain the trust and confidence of Ministers and the Government** and help them to develop and implement their policies. Ministers must have confidence that we will provide trusted service to New Zealand and will not use our positions to pursue

our own political interests or objectives. Being politically neutral helps us to maintain the distinction between the work of Ministers in making decisions and advocating for policies and our work in providing advice and delivering services.

- c. **We maintain the trust and confidence of the public** in the Public Service as an institution. The public needs to know that regardless of which political party or parties are in power, the Public Service will continue to perform its function for New Zealand. To prevent this trust from being undermined, we need to be careful to remain politically neutral in the public statements we make and the actions we take on behalf of our agencies.

### **What are our roles?**

- 2.4 Our leaders have a responsibility to ensure that they and the agencies they lead uphold the principle of political neutrality. We need to support our leaders in performing that duty, and each of us needs to make sure that we do not act in a way that would undermine the principle.
- 2.5 These obligations do not generally prevent us from being politically active in our private lives. Expressing our personal political opinions outside of work in our own time is unlikely to undermine the principle of political neutrality, provided that we do not:
  - represent or give the impression that we represent our agency; or
  - disclose or utilise confidential government information.

- 2.6 For those of us who are senior public servants or who work closely with Ministers, additional caution is required and is outlined further in the practical guidance below.

## Practical guidance

### Political neutrality for public servants as individuals

#### Individual rights, freedoms and responsibilities

- 2.7 Public servants have the same rights to freedom of speech and political activity in their private lives as other New Zealanders under the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990. Like other New Zealanders, public servants are strongly supportive of good government and care about the issues affecting New Zealand.
- 2.8 Public servants also have a responsibility to act in a way that enables their agency to maintain the confidence of its current Minister and of future Ministers<sup>3</sup>.
- 2.9 Public sector agencies must ensure that they respect the political rights of their employees and do not unreasonably impinge on these rights. At all times, there must be a proper balance between respect for public servants' democratic and civil rights and the public interest in having a politically neutral and effective Public Service.

<sup>3</sup> [Cabinet Manual 2023](#) paragraph 3.72

### Public servants engaging in political activity

- 2.10 Many public servants have their own political views and support particular political parties. Being politically neutral at work does not generally stop public servants from being politically active outside work. For most public servants, participating in politics outside the workplace is unlikely to breach their agency's political neutrality obligations.
- 2.11 In general, there is nothing wrong with having interests or activities outside work that may create a conflict with your agency role, so long as they are identified and appropriately managed. However, there may be circumstances where it is difficult to reconcile personal political interests with performing a public sector role. Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission can help in these situations.
- 2.12 Public servants involved with a political party, or who intend to comment publicly on political matters, including via social media, need to be careful that they do not:
- reveal advice given to Ministers
  - disclose information they are not authorised to disclose
  - purport to express an agency view when they are giving their own view
  - criticise government policy with which they have been professionally involved.

## Things to think about

2.13 There are some things to think about when engaging in any political activity outside work that might impact your role as a public servant. Whether a particular political interest or activity might impact on a work role, and whether it can be managed, may depend on the:

- seniority of the role
- nature of the role
- scope and scale of the political activity.

## The seniority of the role

2.14 Working in the public sector is a privilege, involving ready access to government information, status and influence. The more senior the role within the structure of the agency, the greater that person's profile, influence and proximity to Ministers and government is likely to be. Some public servants will need to exercise careful judgement and care when considering political activity outside of work and consider public perceptions if they:

- hold a senior position within an agency
- have regular direct contact with Ministers or represent a public face of their agency
- work in a Minister's office
- are actively engaged in providing advice to Ministers on an issue that is the subject of contested political activity.

2.15 The greater the seniority and influence, the less appropriate political activity outside work may be.

## The nature of the role

2.16 Any potential for overlap or conflict will depend on what the public sector role involves and the requirements of the role. Roles that are more likely to be impacted by a public servant's political activity outside work include those that involve regular, direct contact with Ministers, communication on behalf of the agency or advising Ministers on politically topical issues.

## The scope and scale of the political activity

2.17 Voting in an election is a democratic right and is always encouraged. However, political expression that involves breaching the law or a code of conduct is never acceptable. For example, the unauthorised disclosure of government information or the misuse of government resources for political purposes is not acceptable.

2.18 Public servants should consider whether the scope and scale of the political activity could interfere with their work duties or the political neutrality of the public sector. Questions they could ask are whether the political activity (including the way it is conducted):

- has a negative impact on the confidence of Ministers and the public in the political neutrality of the public sector
- interferes with duties or workplace relationships
- involves a serious breach of the Standards of Integrity and Conduct, for example, involves the unauthorised release of data, other government information, private or personal information, government policy, financial information or criminal conduct
- brings into question someone's ability to perform their role in the eyes of the public
- causes some other kind of harm to the legitimate interests of the public sector.

### **Public servants as members of unions**

2.19 Public servants have the right to join and be active in lawful organisations including trade unions. Participating in the lawful activities of unions within government workplaces is acceptable at all times, and managers should work constructively with union representatives to enable this.


2.20 As a consequence of this right, it is anticipated there will sometimes be an expression of political views inside the workplace. Political expression and participation should normally be undertaken in the individual's own time. To the extent that union activity leads to political expression within the workplace, this should be carried out in a reasonable way and respect normal business operations. These activities should not be visible to the general public.

2.21 Distributing and discussing union material in the workplace does not breach a public servant's obligations around political neutrality. It is important that public servants continue to carry out their job without letting their personal interests or views influence their advice or behaviour and act without bias towards one political party or another.

### **Public servants as members of a profession or with a statutory role**

2.22 Public servants who are members of professions with their own professional obligations or code of ethics need to consider how these fit with their political neutrality responsibilities as public servants.



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- 2.23 For example, members of a profession may wish to comment publicly in a personal capacity on work-related matters within their areas of expertise. Members should be open and honest in their actions. This will involve raising the matter first with the agency and not disclosing official information that has not been made public. Public servants in this situation should not enter into debate criticising or advocating for particular politicians or political parties or comment on particular political party policies.
- 2.24 Public servants who have a statutory role that involves public advocacy need to consider how to fulfil this role while maintaining political neutrality. This will involve ensuring their comments focus on their statutory role rather than political advocacy. They too should not comment on particular political party policies. Statutory duties that public servants have as members of a profession prevail over these responsibilities, but the public servant should raise any inconsistency with their agency.
- 2.25 A public servant who has a spokesperson role with a professional body or union has fewer constraints when making comments that are critical of the Government or of the management of the agency. It is important in these cases that comments are clearly made on behalf of the professional body or union.

## Personal use of social media

- 2.26 Public servants are free to use social media in their private lives. The Standards of Integrity and Conduct, political neutrality obligations and agencies' own policies apply to all media communications outside work, as with other forms of communication. There should be a clear separation between public servants' work role and their personal use of social media. See: [Guidance: Public servants' personal use of social media](#).

## Use of agency resources

- 2.27 Agency resources and premises should not be used for activities that could be regarded as party political. Agencies may have a 'reasonable personal use' policy but agency resources such as printers, office supplies and email systems should not be used to support the private political activities of individuals.
- 2.28 Public servants should not provide their workplace contact details to political parties.

## Public servants and select committees

2.29 Public servants have the same political rights as other members of society, including the right to make submissions to, and appear as witnesses before, select committees. Public servants should be careful, however, that their attendance in a personal capacity is consistent with their professional obligations to the government of the day and that any conflicts of interest are able to be managed. In particular, public servants who appear in a private capacity should:

- make it clear to the committee that they appear in a private capacity
- not use information they have received in confidence through their work role in the submission
- avoid commenting on policy issues related to their own agency or which they have been professionally associated with
- advise their manager that they will be attending.

## Political neutrality for public servants in their official role

- 2.30 The Public Service serves the government of the day and successive governments, regardless of their political composition. This means public servants must always act in a way that maintains the confidence of the current government and ensure the same relationship can be established with future governments.
- 2.31 It is never acceptable for a public servant acting in an official capacity to express their personal political views in a way that raises questions about their ability to perform their role in a politically neutral way. Expressing such views can impact the confidence of Ministers or the public in the political neutrality of the Public Service.
- 2.32 Public sector agencies are accountable to their Minister and usually need to work through their Minister when engaging with the legislative branch including Parliament, Members of Parliament and other political parties.

## Engaging with Members of Parliament

- 2.33 Members of Parliament (MPs) may interact with agencies from time to time as representatives of constituents in their electorate. Generally, public servants should respond to any approach by an MP in the same way they would respond to an approach by a member of the public.

2.34 Any requests for information or services over and above what would normally be provided to the public (e.g. a visit to an agency's premises or a substantial briefing) must be referred to the agency's chief executive. The chief executive will first consider any risks to political neutrality. They can decline a request if the proposal is likely to undermine the political neutrality of the agency, or if a request is otherwise inappropriate for the agency. Following this consideration, the chief executive should refer the request to the relevant Minister, along with any appropriate advice, for their consideration.

### Engaging with political parties

2.35 From time to time, Ministers may ask officials to attend a meeting of a caucus committee or caucus or provide a briefing to a member or members of Parliament, particularly to support Ministers in briefing their colleagues about a current issue or proposed legislation. Public servants should not attend a caucus meeting of a political party represented in the House without first obtaining the agreement of the agency chief executive and the responsible Minister. Public servants are responsible to their Minister, not to caucus, and should only attend such meetings to support their Minister.

2.36 Before attending such a meeting, public servants should obtain clear instructions from their Minister and chief executive on the purpose of their attendance. Public servants should limit their involvement to providing factual information or expert opinion, while avoiding any comment that could be construed as political.

2.37 Public servants should not undertake work at the direction of caucuses, nor should they service caucuses or caucus committees. Policy work carried out by officials should not be used to develop party political material or be labelled as party policy. Any instructions that might emerge from caucus discussions should be given to the agency only by the responsible Minister.

2.38 Government policy should generally be confirmed through the Cabinet and Cabinet committee decision-making process and then announced by the Minister in their official capacity. In addition:

- Agency premises and resources, including their staff (e.g. photos of or communication with public servants), should not be used for political party purposes.
- A public servant should not attend a political party event in their official capacity.
- Public servants should support Ministers as usual in events such as programme launches but should avoid any political aspects of such an event.

## Engaging with select committees

- 2.39 Select committees are the main point of contact between public servants and Parliament. Public servants may appear before select committees as advisers (e.g. when the committee is considering a Bill) or as witnesses (e.g. when the committee is scrutinising an agency's Estimates, reviewing agency performance or undertaking an inquiry). In any case, public servants appear in support of Ministerial accountability, and they are therefore subject to Ministerial direction in terms of questions to be answered and information to be supplied. See: [Guidance: Officials and Select Committees – Guidelines](#).

## Advertising and publicity

- 2.40 The Guidelines for Government Advertising define government advertising as “any process for which payment is made from public funds for the purpose of publicising any policy, product, service or activity provided at public expense by the government”. This definition is intentionally broad and can include an authorised public servant speaking to members of the public, a consultation document or putting information out through social media.

- 2.41 Public sector agencies undertake advertising and publicity. There are legitimate reasons for doing so, including informing the public about government policies, the services available, and their rights and responsibilities. Public funds should not be used to pay for publicity for party political purposes.
- 2.42 There must be a clear purpose and an identified and justifiable information need for government advertising and publicity. It must be presented in a manner that is accurate, factual, truthful, fair, honest, impartial, lawful and proper, and comply with all relevant legislation and government policies. See [Guidance: Guidelines for Government Advertising](#) and [Guidance: Interpreting and Applying the Guidelines for Government Advertising](#).

## Official use of social media

- 2.43 Agencies must develop a social media policy that sets out how they will use social media, who is authorised to use it in an official capacity, and key responsibilities for using it including under the Standards of Integrity and Conduct.
- 2.44 There should be a clear business purpose for an agency's use of social media that is linked to its role and functions. See: [Guidance: Public servants' official use of social media](#).

## Media comment

- 2.45 When corresponding with the media, agencies must take care to ensure that communications material is factual and politically neutral, the Minister is kept informed and information and advice requests are handled promptly by the most appropriate person, agency or Minister.
- 2.46 Public servants need to identify whether issues are primarily political or operational and whether they are most appropriately handled by the Minister or by the agency. Political matters relate to the functions of the Minister. Ministers are responsible for determining and promoting policy, defending policy decisions and answering in the House on both policy and operational matters.
- 2.47 Chief executives are responsible for operational matters. Ministers are generally not involved in agencies' day-to-day operations.

## Official Information Act requests

- 2.48 [Chapter 8 of the Cabinet Manual](#) (see paragraphs 8.53 to 8.57 in particular) includes guidance on the release of official information, including the involvement of Ministers in a release. An agency may consult its Minister about any request for official information received. An agency should consult its Minister if the request relates to Cabinet material (as this is related to their activities as a Minister).
- 2.49 Upon being consulted, a Minister may take the view that information an agency considers suitable for release, should not be released. In such cases, agencies should consider whether there is an obligation to transfer the request to the Minister under [section 14 of the Official Information Act 1982](#). The obligation to transfer will arise where the requested information is held by the Minister (but not the agency) or is more closely connected with the Minister's functions. The only reasons for withholding official information are those specified in the Act.
- 2.50 Public servants should not become involved in assessing the political consequences of releasing information. An agency should advise its Minister if it intends to release any information that is particularly sensitive or potentially controversial, in accordance with the "no surprises" principle. A notification for this purpose is not the same as consultation and should not unduly delay the release of information. See: [Agency Guidance: Minister and Agency Official Information Requests](#) and [Solicitor-General's 'No Surprises' Guidance](#).

## Political neutrality and the election period

- 2.51 The normal conventions of political neutrality continue to apply at the time of a general election or a by-election. However, there can be heightened sensitivity around political neutrality and greater scrutiny on the actions of the public sector at this time, so some extra care is required.
- 2.52 Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission publishes guidance covering the period before, during and after a general election. Much of this guidance has more general application outside of the election period as well. Topics include public servants at work, public servants outside work, responsibilities of public sector agencies, advertising, publicity and the media and Government processes before, during and after an election. See [Guidance: General Election Guidance](#).

# 3

## Tohutohu Hāngai Free and Frank Advice

*We give free and frank advice to Ministers.*

### What is free and frank advice?

- 3.1 Free and frank advice is about agencies providing advice to Ministers without fear or favour, using our best professional judgement. By doing this, we strengthen the integrity and performance of New Zealand's system of government.
- 3.2 Free and frank advice focuses on the decision-maker's objectives, while also being honest, politically neutral, constructive and free from undue influence. This is particularly important for us to remember when challenging the decision-maker's understanding and initial preference.

### Why is free and frank advice important?

Free and frank advice is the foundation upon which:

- a. **We support Ministers to make better decisions.** In giving free and frank advice, we make sure that Ministers are individually and collectively informed about the pros, cons, uncertainties and potential consequences associated with the decisions that they are being asked to make. We respect the decisions and the mandate of Ministers as elected representatives.

- b. **We give the public confidence that Ministers' decisions are well informed.** The public relies on us to give our best advice and to provide Ministers with a range of options. Good policy decisions, informed by free and frank advice, optimise services and results for the people in New Zealand now and into the future.

### What are our roles?

- 3.4 Our leaders are responsible for ensuring that free and frank advice is given to Ministers by their agencies. We need to support our leaders to make sure that they have access to all the information, evidence and analysis to do that. How we provide that support will depend on the nature of the job that we do.
- 3.5 If our job involves providing advice directly or indirectly to Ministers, we need to be mindful of the wider context. This includes being aware of, and responsive to, the priorities as determined by the government of the day.
- 3.6 Our advice needs to include all relevant information. This requires us to understand both what has been requested and what is required to enable Ministers to achieve their desired results for people in New Zealand. It is important to keep both in mind.
- 3.7 We freely give advice to Ministers on how the government's objectives can be best achieved. Our advice, where possible, is based on research, evidence, evaluation and analysis and supported by long-term policy capability. We canvas a range of options, aim to incorporate a range of perspectives and inform Ministers about the pros, cons, uncertainties and consequences of each.



## Practical guidance


### A relationship of trust and confidence

- 3.8 Effective free and frank advice depends on a relationship of trust and confidence. We support this relationship with our Ministers by providing quality advice and demonstrating that we are committed to helping them achieve their objectives.

### Communicating advice


- 3.9 A Minister's communication style preference is important and providing advice in their preferred style will support effective free and frank advice. Understanding and operating within this context is key.
- 3.10 It is also important to consider whether the advice has been understood. If it has not, it may be necessary to repeat the advice or reconsider the way in which it was delivered.

### Documenting advice

- 3.11 We must be diligent in maintaining full and accurate records of advice provided. Where we have given advice verbally, we record key points and decisions. Where applicable, we comply with Protective Security Requirements when documenting our advice.
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## Links to additional guidance

- 3.12 This guidance complements and should be read alongside:
- [Guidance: Free and frank advice and policy stewardship](#)
  - [Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet - Free and frank advice](#)
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# 4

## Kopounga Whai-painga Merit-based Appointments

*We make merit-based appointments.*

### What are merit-based appointments?

- 4.1 Making a merit-based appointment means giving preference to the candidate who is best suited to the position.<sup>4</sup>
- 4.2 Merit-based appointments are an essential cornerstone of our professional and politically neutral public sector. Merit-based appointments act as a safeguard to political patronage, favouritism and prejudice.
- 4.3 Determining the candidate best suited to a position requires us to identify the skills, responsibilities and effort that are necessary to perform the role. Criteria identified may include (but are not limited to) qualifications, technical knowledge, experience, team fit, cultural competency, community connections or other relevant work features.

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<sup>4</sup> Public Service Act 2020, [Section 72](#), Crown Entities Act 2004, [Section 118](#) requires the impartial selection of suitably qualified persons for appointment.

### Why are merit-based appointments important?

4.4 Merit-based appointments are the foundation upon which:

- **We maintain procedural fairness.** By having selection processes that are open and fair, we support and attract a workforce who understand and can deliver services to meet the needs of different communities.
- **We develop a highly capable workforce.** Understanding that appointments are based on merit provides an incentive to perform our roles to the best of our abilities. Merit-based appointments also ensure the public sector reaps the benefit of a diverse and inclusive workforce.
- **We maintain public confidence** in our ability to act impartially and make appointments without undue political influence.

### What are our roles?

- 4.5 Our leaders have a responsibility to ensure their agencies uphold the principle of merit-based appointment. We all have a part to play in applying the principle. However, depending on our level of involvement in recruitment, some of us will make recruitment decisions or will be involved in running recruitment processes in other ways. For those of us performing these roles, we need to follow our agency's internal policies and work to ensure independence, confidentiality, fairness and transparency in the appointment or promotion of individuals.



## Practical guidance

### Recruitment and Employment Practices

- 4.6 We make sure that all appointments are lawful, follow the required statutory processes and adhere to internal recruitment policies. Permanent appointments are made through an open and contestable process.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, we adhere to the Good employer requirements outlined in both [section 73 of the Public Service Act 2020](#) and [section 118 of the Crown Entities Act 2004](#).

### Diversity and inclusion

- 4.7 Merit-based appointments and diversity and inclusion are consistent and mutually reinforcing. Merit-based appointments help us to recruit a diverse workforce with the experience and expertise to improve the lives of all the people we serve. Agencies should ensure their definitions of merit are defined around the requirements of the [Equal Pay Act 1972](#) (focusing on skills, responsibilities, experience and effort required by the work).

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<sup>4</sup>Public Service Act 2020, [Section 64\(2\)\(a\)](#), [section 70](#) and [section 89](#) are exceptions to a merit-based appointment for public service agencies.



## Links to additional guidance

- 4.8 This guidance complements and should be read alongside:
- [Guidance: Recruitment guidance for public service recruiters](#)
  - [Model Standards: Workforce assurance model standards](#)
  - [Guidance: Diversity and inclusion](#)
  - [Guidance: Addressing bias](#)

# 5

## Kāwanatanga Tuwhera Open Government

*We foster a culture of open government.*

### What is open government?

- 5.1 Open government is about strengthening democracy in New Zealand by ensuring its people can understand and actively contribute to what government does and how it does it.
- 5.2 At its core, it is about improving **transparency** of the workings of government, citizen **participation** and **accountability** of the government to its people. Open government has a strong reciprocal relationship with trust and confidence in the Public Service.
- 5.3 We must also balance transparency with legitimate needs for keeping some information confidential. Disclosure of government information still needs to occur within our agency's information management policies, procedures and the law.

### Why is open government important?

- 5.4 Open government is the foundation upon which:
  - a. **We raise public understanding of how government works.** By being transparent about the work that we do, the public will learn more about how government works and how it is relevant to them. In turn, we build public trust.

- b. **We promote participation.** By supporting engagement with government, the public will have a deeper understanding of relevant issues and can provide richer contribution to discussion. We will be more responsive and able to develop innovative solutions.

- c. **We demonstrate our accountability to the public.** Where possible, we do this by proactively being open with the public about the decisions that we make. By doing so, they can be assured that public authority and funds are being used appropriately.

### What are our roles?

- 5.5 Our leaders have a responsibility to ensure their agencies uphold the principle of open government. We need to support them in performing that duty, but as individuals, we can also foster a culture of open government by identifying and discussing opportunities to be open. A culture of open government is one that looks for opportunities to be open whether it is within an agency or working across agencies. We should enable transparency, participation and accountability within the discretion we have.
- 5.6 There are a number of rules and frameworks that support open government such as access to information, consultation frameworks, co-designing services and how we provide advice. Our role is to work through these relevant frameworks where they apply to our work. Open government is an evolving space. As improvements are embedded into the system, we seek out further opportunities to enhance our practices.




## Practical guidance

### Access to information

5.7 Where possible, we support our agency to release information to the public through internal policies and applicable legislation. This includes proactive release of information and publishing of official information statistics. Confidentiality and privacy obligations are also important and are consistent with open government. Our default position should be open, unless by law there is good reason to withhold it. For more information see: [Agency guidance: OIA guidance for agencies](#) and [Guidance: Maintaining confidentiality of Government information](#).

### Participation

5.8 Where possible we seek participation from the people we serve in the way we design services, inform policies and develop partnerships that benefit our communities. We consider ways of providing services to minimise barriers around accessibility and understanding. Where practicable, we seek input and feedback from a range of different public perspectives to inform our work. For more information see: [Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet - Community engagement toolbox](#).



## Providing advice

5.9 When providing advice to Ministers and others, we encourage decision-makers to facilitate open government and public participation (where possible). We do this in a way that respects the relevant cabinet conventions and protections under the Official Information Act for free and frank advice.

### Links to additional guidance

5.10 This guidance complements and should be read alongside:

- [Guidance: OIA Statistics](#)
- [Guidance: Proactive release](#)
- [Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet - Cabinet Manual](#)



# 6

## Kaitiakitanga | Stewardship

*We proactively promote stewardship of the Public Service.*

### What is stewardship?

- 6.1 Stewardship is a proactive duty of care for something that belongs to or exists for the benefit of others, now and into the future. Being a good steward requires active planning and management of resources so that the public's medium and long-term interests can be protected.
- 6.2 The Public Service Act states that stewardship of the Public Service includes a duty of care for:
- its long-term capability and its people
  - its institutional knowledge and information
  - its systems and processes
  - its assets
  - the legislation administered by agencies<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>6</sup>Public Service Act 2020, [Section 12\(1\)\(e\)](#).

### Why is stewardship important?

6.3 Stewardship is the foundation upon which:

**a. We protect against short-term thinking when developing policy and making decisions.**

Stewardship requires us to look ahead and provide advice on future challenges and opportunities to strengthen New Zealand. In doing so, we connect long-term public service stewardship with the priorities of the government of the day.

**b. We enhance our capability to serve future governments and the public.** By providing strategic advice on medium and long-term issues, we position ourselves well for future service.

**c. We protect the long-term sustainability of New Zealand's system of government.** By designing our systems and processes with longevity in mind and by caring for our people, knowledge, information and assets, we are well placed to support the continuity of New Zealand's entire system of government.

## What are our roles?

- 6.4 Our leaders have a responsibility to ensure their agencies uphold and promote the principle of stewardship. There are several different ways in which we can support them to perform that duty including:
- 6.5 Supporting Ministers to be good stewards of the public interest. We do this by encouraging them to maintain institutions, assets and liabilities, as well as the currency of the legislation administered by their agency, and by providing advice on long term implications of policies.<sup>7</sup>
- 6.6 Fulfilling independent stewardship obligations our agency may have. There are statutory obligations of stewardship that chief executives owe directly to Parliament and the public. This work must be done independently of Ministers. An example of this is long-term insights briefings, which provide information on medium to long term trends, risks and opportunities that may affect New Zealand.<sup>8</sup>
- 6.7 Stewardship of personal and official information. We are stewards of New Zealanders' personal information and official information. It is important that we ensure we have good information management practices that protect personal and official information now and into the future.

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<sup>7</sup> Public Service Act 2020, [Section 52\(1\)\(d\)](#).

<sup>8</sup> Public Service Act 2020, [Schedule 6, clause 8](#).



## Practical guidance

- 6.8 While public service agencies have some statutory stewardship duties, all agencies can promote stewardship through some of these actions.

### Long term capability and people

- 6.9 We need to anticipate, actively manage and plan for our future workforce so that we can meet future challenges. This can be supported by developing future-focussed capability and ensuring this is embedded throughout our teams and processes. We also ensure we have data and information that can support us to do that. In supporting stewardship responsibilities of the Commissioner and the Public Service Leadership Team, the Public Service should use common workforce standards. See: [Te Kawa Mataaho Guidance: Information standards and guidance](#).





## Institutional knowledge and information

- 6.10 We must preserve our institutional knowledge and information, including by meeting the requirements of the Public Records Act 2005. This means we maintain information practices in accordance with our legal obligations and ensure information is recorded and can be found. However, it is more than that. It is also about our people and their experiences, memory and expertise. It is just as important to encourage continuous knowledge sharing and succession planning for critical roles in our agencies and teams.

## Systems and processes

- 6.11 We must work to ensure that our systems and processes are robust so that the Public Service can deliver and maintain the services that we provide to the public. We can promote stewardship by regularly monitoring, reviewing, evaluating and updating systems and processes with sustainability and security in mind.

## Assets

- 6.12 The Crown is responsible for significant public assets which are crucial to providing services to the public. Stewardship of both physical and digital assets goes beyond complying with the Public Finance Act 1989 and requires us to protect and maintain these assets for the long-term benefit of New Zealand. See: [Office of the Auditor General - Managing Public Assets 2013](#).



## Stewardship of legislation

- 6.13 Legislation and more fundamentally, regulatory systems and service delivery arrangements, need ongoing care and attention to deliver effectively and fairly over time. In practice, this is about proactive monitoring, reviewing and updating of our legislation and administrative practices so that the systems we operate under are fit for purpose for our current and future contexts. For more information on regulatory system stewardship see: [Treasury - Government Expectations for Good Regulatory Practice](#) and [Treasury - Starting out with regulatory stewardship - An introductory resource](#).

## Links to additional guidance

- 6.14 This guidance complements and should be read alongside:
- [Te Kawa Mataaho - Long-term insights briefings](#)



## Rārangi kupu | Glossary

For the purpose of this guidance, unless the context specifically requires otherwise, the terms and phrases used in this guidance have the following meanings:

Term	Explanation
<b>Public Service</b>	is the collective term for departments, departmental agencies, interdepartmental executive boards, interdepartmental ventures and Crown agents. See <a href="#">section 10</a> of the Public Service Act 2020.
<b>Public sector</b>	is the collective term for all the agencies this guidance is issued to including departments, departmental agencies and statutory Crown entities.
<b>Public servant</b>	is any employee or contractor working for the agencies listed under ‘Who this guidance is for.’
<b>Our leaders</b>	are the responsible leaders of agencies to which this guidance applies. This includes agency chief executives and boards of Crown entities.
<b>We or us</b>	is used to refer to public servants.
<b>Our</b>	is used to refer to things that belong collectively to public servants (either all public servants or a significant proportion of public servants, depending on the context).





## Rārangi kupu mo Te Reo Māori

### Te Reo Māori Glossary

The translations referred to within this guidance will be referred to as a ‘descriptor’ as part of this glossary. Some words or concepts do not have like for like translations in Te Reo Māori. The descriptors used, where possible, are direct translations of the words or are *kīwaha* (idiom) which provide a relevant description.

Term	Explanation
<b>Ngā Pou</b>	is the Te Reo Māori title used for <b>Principles</b> . Pou is a commonly used and recognised term that can be translated as pillar, support or something that is fixed and immovable.
<b>Te Noho Taiapa</b>	is the descriptor for the <b>politically neutral</b> principle.  It is a <i>kīwaha</i> and directly translates to ‘sit on the fence’. For clarity, it is not expected that public servants sit on the fence in all situations especially in relation to their rights and freedoms. However they should consider political neutrality as part of their role as a public servant and the guidance within this context.
<b>Tohutohu Hāngai</b>	is the descriptor for the <b>free and frank advice</b> principle. Tohutohu is a translation for ‘to advise’. Hāngai is a translation for directly and is commonly used in the <i>kīwaha</i> ‘me hāngai te kōrero’ which can be translated to keeping to the point or ‘don’t beat around the bush.’
<b>Kopounga Whai-painga</b>	is the Te Reo Māori descriptor for the <b>merit-based appointments</b> principle. Kopounga is a translation for appointee, appointment or successful candidate. Whai-painga is a translation for merit-based or to be of value or benefit.
<b>Kāwanatanga Tuwhera</b>	is the Te Reo Māori descriptor used for <b>open government</b> . Kāwanatanga is the translation for Government and tuwhera is to open or be open.
<b>Kaitiakitanga</b>	is the Te Reo Māori descriptor used for <b>stewardship</b> . Kaitiakitanga in its simplest form is translated to guardianship, stewardship or trustee.

